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GEORGE MOORE'S  
COMMUNICATION TO  
HIS FRIENDS



*A  
Communication  
to  
my friends*

BY  
*George Moore*



*The Nonesuch Press*  
*1933*



*Note*  
BY THE LITERARY  
EXECUTOR

When arrangements were made for the completion of the uniform edition of his works, George Moore proposed to write a general introduction to be published with "A Mummer's Wife" which he had designated as volume I. As the writing of this introduction progressed the work grew under his hand, his interest and his enthusiasm increased as he told the story of his journey to London with the manuscript of his first novel, his meetings with publishers, his struggle with the libraries and his final success, so that he foresaw a separate publication, under the title of "A Communication to my Friends," of what he had at first only intended as an introduction to the uniform edition. He continued to work with astonishing energy and concentration at the "Communication" until within a few days of his death on the 21st January, 1933, but he had by then written only one half of what he had in mind and a third of that had not been revised. Unfinished though it is, his friends will wish to have, not merely the very last thing which George Moore wrote, but something so characteristic as the easy and familiar talk of this "Communication." The part which remains unrevised is included with the rest. George Moore, as was his wont, would have revised and polished the whole, but perhaps the very lack of that revision gives a more personal touch to his last writing.

*Audiero nunquam tua facta loquentem.*

C. D. MEDLEY





# *A Communication to*

## MY FRIENDS

### I

On the occasion of an author publishing the uniform edition of his works, or a selection made by himself of the dozen, or better still, the half-dozen volumes that he looks upon as representing his art, it is usual, nay almost a politeness, for him to take his readers into his confidence and tell them how it came to pass that he retired from the ordinary amusements of life to writing about life.

I have often been asked if it was accident that turned me towards literature, or if it was an instinct within me that I could not control. The next questioner would ask if my characters are wholly imaginary, or copies of people I have met in my way through life. A third questioner would like to hear if I had encountered difficulties, and if so, how I had overcome them, arriving at last at success. All these questions provided me with the substance of a book about myself, but to write about myself I must look down the years through the spy-glass of memory for the day and the hour when I began to be myself.

The glass reveals to me a pretty apartment in the Rue de la Tour des Dames with myself sitting at an open window enjoying the perfume of the spring air coming up from the fragment of garden between the houses and the street. The young man is absorbed in happy thoughts, which vanish quickly when a letter is brought in. He opens the envelope with reluctance and listening (memory includes sound as well as sight) I hear him say, "A letter from Joe Blake." After a pause the young man, in whom I can still recognize myself, mutters, "Joe Blake was always a fool, and now he is more a fool than ever, for he wishes me to come over to Ireland to find another agent. A fool he was and a fool he will remain, interested only in his two-year-olds, and these he breaks down on the lumpy fields which he calls his racecourse. But I cannot waste any more time puzzling out a difficult handwriting. I am engaged to sit for Manet," and it was whilst choosing the suit, the necktie and the hat that he first saw me in that I said to myself, "I will read Joe's letter carefully after the sitting." But thoughts cannot be restrained, and Manet, guessing from my face that something disagreeable had happened to me, said, "You must have received a disagreeable letter this morning. You are no longer *le plus parisien de tous les anglais*." "Does that matter?" I asked him. "Of course it matters." I took the pose and he repainted his portrait *malgré lui*, but after an hour's work he picked up his knife and to my great disappoint-

ment scraped out his morning's work. "I am afraid I did not sit as well as usual." "You sat well enough, but something has disturbed you." "I shall be more like myself to-morrow." "Then, to-morrow."

In the Boule Noire, whither I went for breakfast, I read Joe's letter carefully from end to end and it did not seem on the second reading so terrible as it had on the first, and whilst I drank my coffee I sought his reasons for writing a letter which he must have known would frighten me. We are all part and parcel of our environment. Manet would not paint the same portraits in Ireland that he paints in Paris, and I could not write *A Modern Lover*, as *Lewis Seymour and Some Women* was then called, in Mayo. The Boule Noire, the Nouvelle Athènes and the Rue de la Tour des Dames are part of my inspiration and were I to go to Moore Hall I should have to live without my library of Parnassian poets, volumes signed by all the young men in Montmartre and the Quartier Latin. At Moore Hall I should feel as Adam did when he was turned out of Paradise.

"Garçon, un verre de Cognac." An inspiring liqueur, I said, and after the first glass I bethought myself of writing to Joe that I was half-way through *A Modern Lover* and that an American publisher who had gotten news of my book through the newspapers had offered me a contract and was willing to pay five hundred pounds in advance of royalties, but I was holding out for a thousand,

I added, thinking that Joe would be certain to postpone the bringing of me back to Mayo until the thousand pounds was in the bank, and to tempt him still more insidiously I added that I had little doubt that the American would pay on the arrival of the MS.

The invention of these lies amused me, though I never liked telling lies, but was I lying? My conscience answered faintly, only anticipating a literary success on the strength of some poems which were admired in the cafés, and what seemed more convincing, to myself, if not to Joe, was the fact that I had written the text of a drama on Martin Luther which would bring me a fortune when played. Joe writes, I said, in ignorance of the important position I occupy in France, and in a few days I shall get a letter from him insisting on my return to Mayo to help him to collect my own rents. But a week went by, then a fortnight, and then a month without a letter from Joe, and I began to seek for a cause for his silence, asking myself if he had changed his mind and did not want me in Mayo, and then if he had accepted *au pied de la lettre* all that I had told him about the American publisher. Or he might have won a big race at the Curragh and was no longer short of money—but that cannot be, Joe is always short of money—and walking across the room I sought for other reasons which would account for my being left in Paris. The agitation against rent-paying may have died down, and I am no longer frightened that I shall not

be able to finish *A Modern Lover*. Only a few pages of the book remain to be written, I said, and I yielded myself to the happiness of an achievement, a small achievement perhaps, but still an achievement. The only cloud in my sky was the certainty that I would have to go to London to find a publisher—it was barely possible to publish from Paris—and it seemed to me that the besetting difficulty of the moment was how to get out of Paris without going round to all my friends to take leave of them, for as my taste was for long visits I foresaw a month of visiting before I should be ready to leave. The ordinary course would be to send cards by post with p.p.c. in the corner, a very common and cold-hearted way of bidding good-bye to friends whom I loved and who loved me. A week later I left Paris, telling the concierge that he might expect me back in a fortnight.

One of the hardships of writing *A Communication to My Friends*, which is the story of how literature hailed me, is the existence of a little book called *Confessions of a Young Man*, for in this book I tell how, in my early childhood, whilst driving in a family coach from Mayo into Galway, I heard a cry, or shall I call it echo-augury, and accepting quotation as a lesser evil than paraphrase, I will quote:

“*Scene:* A great family coach, drawn by two powerful country horses, lumbers along a narrow Irish road. The ever-recurrent signs—long ranges of blue mountains, the streak of bog, the rotting cabin, the flock of plover rising from the desolate water. Inside the coach there are two children. They wear new jackets and neckties; their faces are pale with sleep, and the rolling of the coach makes them feel a little sick. It is seven o’clock in the morning. Opposite the children are their parents, and they are talking of a novel the world is reading. Did Lady Audley murder her husband? Lady Audley! What a beautiful name! And she, who is a slender, pale, fairy-like woman, killed her husband. Such thoughts flash through the boy’s mind; his imagination is stirred and quickened,

and he begs for an explanation. The coach lumbers along, it arrives at its destination, and Lady Audley is forgotten in the delight of tearing down fruit trees and killing a cat.

“But when we returned home I took the first opportunity of stealing the novel in question. I read it eagerly, passionately, vehemently. I read its successor and its successor. I read until I came to a book called *The Doctor's Wife*—a lady who loved Shelley and Byron. There was magic, there was revelation in the name, and Shelley became my soul's divinity. Why did I love Shelley? Why not attracted to Byron? Shelley! That crystal name, and his poetry also crystalline. I must see it. I must know him. Escaping from the schoolroom, I ransacked the library, and at last my ardour was rewarded. The book—a small pocket edition in red boards, no doubt long out of print—opened at the ‘Sensitive Plant.’ Was I disappointed? I think I had expected to understand better; but I had no difficulty in assuming that I was satisfied and delighted. And henceforth the little volume never left my pocket, and I read the dazzling stanzas by the shores of a pale green Irish lake, comprehending little, and loving a great deal.”

Of *Lady Audley's Secret* and its successors I retain no more than a few words here and there, a glimpse of the heroine, a murderer in *The Doctor's Wife* who cannot find the key of a trunk belonging to the murdered man—



that impressed me—and remained a faint memory of a detective novel. A more distinct memory was the name of the publisher, Tinsley. His name haunted in my recollection long after nine-tenths of the book had faded out of it, and now that I had come to write a story myself it seemed to me a foregone conclusion that I should publish *A Modern Lover* with Tinsley at Catherine Street. A successful publisher he certainly must have been, and probably still was. Whether a lover of literature or a huckster of novels sold on barrows at thirty-one-and-sixpence I had no faintest notion. I was attracted by the name only. The mysterious power that names have for us possessed me the moment I crossed the gangway and stood by the taffrail so that I might see the coasts of France vanish into the night mist for the last time perhaps. I am naturally pessimistic. Pessimism gives me courage.

“We shall have a stormy night passage,” somebody cried in my hearing, and this certainly was more than an ‘echo-augury,’ for we had just cleared the harbour and the ship was rising and plunging. “I am afraid we shall,” I answered, and walked up the deck, for I had little wish for talk and only hoped that I should not be sea-sick, and to keep my mind off that sad subject I admired the large spaces of sea with a wave coming on, rising higher and higher as it came and shaking the ship from end to end when it struck her. Strange the sea is, I

said, and how it came into existence. I asked myself feebly, was it before the land or after the land, and why was it allowed to carve the land into islands and capes and cliffs, and many other things which I had no stomach to remember. It would have been better to have gone below and to have forgotten all about *A Modern Lover*, but I was intent on seeing the great cliffs of Dover rise out of the horizon. Sometimes I saw them, sometimes they disappeared into the clouds, but at last the shore was certain and the vessel came to a standstill, and on enquiry from a passenger ill as myself I learned that our ship was turning round to back into the harbour stern first. The passengers came up and crowded, all eager to cross the gangway and to hasten down the pier to the customs. A miserable place is Dover pier, with a shockingly bad statue put up by the local Phidias—someone was stabbing somebody or firing at him with a rifle, I know not which. I had no bag to examine and was eager to get into the train, but in the train was no amelioration. The engine must have been a very little one, with not much more strength than a donkey, so slowly did the train creep up the acclivities. At the top of each it trundled along, bringing us of course at every turn of the wheels nearer to London, and the country cleared up, the fields drew out and I dare say some cattle were grazing, but after a stormy passage we had no eyes for the observation of natural things—I speak for the other passen-

gers as well as for myself. A wretched crowd we were, and right glad to see the grey mournful Thames and the multitudinous city drawing out on a dark grey sky, barely visible. The cry "Tickets, please; tickets, please" was welcome. We were on Charing Cross Bridge and everybody I am sure in that train hoped the bridge would not break through by the weight of the train, for once in the water there would be no chance of being saved.

These few lines will remind a good many of the terrors of this passage, and the bleakness of the Charing Cross Hotel was all we had to hope for. I ordered a bed and a cup of chocolate but the chocolate brought was that preparation of cocoa for which it is claimed that 'An extra spoonful will produce chocolate,' a lying device for which I had the manager called up to explain. In the midst of all this bleakness a note had to be written to Mr. Tinsley and given to the porter, who was bribed with half-a-crown to see that it was handed into Mr. Tinsley's office before ten o'clock, and this done I turned from the cocoa-chocolate with nausea. Tea was preferable. We tire of many things in life but I never heard of anybody tiring of tea, and refreshed by a cup I slept for several hours and arrived at Catherine Street, Strand, shortly after three.

"I have come from France," I said to the clerk. "I sent a letter this morning from the Charing Cross Hotel to Mr. Tinsley saying that I would call on him at three

o'clock and that I hoped he would be able to see me at that time." "Ah, you are the gentleman who was to arrive from France this morning?" and I heard with satisfaction that Mr. Tinsley had left word that I was to be brought over to the Gaiety Bar. It seemed strange for a publisher to meet an author in a drinking saloon, but I accepted the appointment as part and parcel of my mission and followed the clerk through swing doors into a long gallery where actors and journalists leaned over a marble counter drinking and talking to the barmaids or to each other. Other Bohemians, writers and painters, sat in upholstered nooks, but what a descent, I said to myself, from the *Nouvelle Athènes*. In an hour from now Manet and Degas, Pissaro and Renoir will be there. The moody Duranty, whose novels don't sell but who is admired for his style, I can see in my imagination surrounded by poets. Hennique is there with Alexis, talking about the new play to be given at the end of the week at the *Variétés*, and all of them have an occasional thought for me. But I stiffened my mind to its purpose. The Gaiety Bar shows how London takes a hint from Paris in the building of a *café*, I was thinking, when the clerk returned to say that he had found Mr. Tinsley with friends. I saw a man rising to meet me. I had expected something less like a cheesemonger. "I am very glad to see you, sir, will you please to take a seat," he said, moving to give me room, and when I was seated he said,

"Give it a name." I had never heard the expression before, and it was explained to me that it meant whisky and water. I answered that I never drank at three o'clock in the day and I applied my eyes to the reading of the faces of the crowd.

My arrival had interrupted their desultory conversation, but it was soon picked up and I expected to hear a literary discussion arise, but I only heard of the prices that might be expected from the different newspapers for occasional articles, and at the end of a few minutes Mr. Tinsley turned to me and said, "Are you sure you won't take anything? It will help you to forget your seasickness," but I shook my head and gave ear to the authors that sat around their publisher. I heard many names that had drifted across the Channel through the medium of the Tauchnitz edition—Black and Reade, Miss Braddon and Mrs. Henry Wood. "Once I had them all," Mr. Tinsley cried in a doleful voice, "sooner or later they will come back to me." A gruff man with a huge beard said, "Yes, Bill, you had them all, and that is perhaps why you haven't got them now." A roar of laughter greeted the pun, which Mr. Tinsley began to resent, and there was a moment when I was afraid that I would be expelled with the crowd from the bar-room by a large chucker-out whom the waiter had called to his assistance. "That fellow Byron Webber, a friend of twenty years, has insulted me. What does he mean, except that I cheated an

author. I never had a dispute with an author except one, a difference of opinion it was. I defy Byron Webber to tell me of another." "And who is Byron Webber?" I said. "A small newspaper supplies him with pocket money, but his main income is from the lodging house which his wife runs in Notting Hill." The words fell on the ears of Byron Webber, who returned quickly from the counter to tell his friend of twenty years what he thought of him. "Gentlemen, gentlemen," said the chucker-out, and suddenly the people round began to talk of something else and Mr. Tinsley and I left the bar-room and went across the street to his publishing office.

"Well, sir," said Mr. Tinsley as he lifted the flap of the counter and took me into his parlour, redolent of cod-fish and chickens. Bringing home the dinner to Streatham, I thought, and having taken a chair I told him that I would like to talk of the MS. which I had brought with me, saying that I had lived in France and had learned from the French school of novelists, especially from Zola. Whatever one might think of his point of view, I continued, which often was common, he certainly had more talent in linking a story together than Daudet. "Yes, the story is the main thing," Mr. Tinsley interjected, and he asked me which of all the French novelists had the largest trade subscription. "Zola, of course," I answered, and whilst listening and answering Mr. Tinsley's questions regarding the money there was in literature, my

thoughts ranged over Zola's novels, stopping at an anecdote that had always amused me and that seemed applicable to Tinsley himself.

A ne'er-do-well had wandered in and out of many trades and had returned, a failure, to his parents' eating-house. Two ducks were roasting before the fire. He watched them with increasing attention until rich gravy began to flow out of their back-sides, and it was then that the truth was revealed to him—he was a cook by vocation. But before I could satisfy myself with the application of the story to Mr. Tinsley, he suddenly broke in, "I am afraid the Sunday dinner I am bringing home to my family offends your nostrils," and removing the basket, asked me to tell him the name of the novel I proposed to publish with him.

I mentioned the name, *A Modern Lover*, and he replied that the name would attract a great many readers but he feared that the librarians might take exception to it, especially if there were a divorce, or a woman living apart from her husband, or a husband living apart from his wife. "The libraries are essentially domestic, they have established a censorship, and this is possible because novels are not published at popular prices as with you in France. In France a novel costs three francs and a half, and here the novel is printed in three volumes and costs thirty-one-and-sixpence." "But you will break the censorship?" "I don't know, but it will be broken one day

or another," he said. "Some two or three successful novelists, if they combined, could do it. Christie Murray is a coming man. You don't know him?" I answered that I had not that privilege, adding that I had only just arrived in London, and I begged him to tell me more about the censorship exercised by the libraries, a subject in which I was specially interested, and he spoke at length. "The whole system is unjust, not only to authors, but to the publishers," and he told a long story of the persecution he had been subjected to. At last, wearying of the sound of his own voice, he said, "Tell me the gist of your story," and I told him that Lewis Seymour was a painter who had had the good fortune to meet Mrs. Bentham in a picture dealer's shop and had been taken down by her to decorate her ballroom in Sussex. "A risky story, but all depends upon the treatment, and if you will leave your manuscript with me, sir, I will give it to a reader on whose judgment I place great reliance. He will mark any passages that he thinks doubtful and perhaps we may come to terms regarding them." "I called on you, Mr. Tinsley, for your name has crossed the Channel as a successful publisher. Moreover I wished to thank you for your edition of *Lady Audley's Secret*, for it brought me, by a circuitous route it is true, to Shelley. Many thanks for having granted me so much of your time. You have other clients to see and perhaps some day when you have read my MS. you will tell me more about the censorship



and how it acts on authors and publishers alike. From what I have heard from you I feel that sooner or later we shall have to abolish the censorship. But who is going to abolish it?" and we both laughed as we parted, I to the Gaiety Bar, yielding myself to a presentiment that I would find in the great gallery material for *A Mummer's Wife*.

As I walked up and down scanning the various faces I came very quickly to distinguish between the journalists and the mummers. "The journalists will help me with paragraphs," I said, "but that will be later. For the moment mummers are my quest, actors returning from long tours in the north of England. As I hesitated, uncertain how to introduce myself to a group telling droll stories, I heard a great voice behind me, a voice that I seemed to know, and turning I found myself face to face with the burly Byron. "What have you done with Bill Tinsley?" he asked. "You have left your manuscript with him?" "The parcel I had in my hand when I had the pleasure of making your acquaintance, Mr. Webber, was the MS. of a novel I wrote in France. I call it *A Modern Lover*." "A good title, but I am afraid it will get Bill into trouble with the librarians." "Does he exaggerate the censorship?" "No, he doesn't, a novelist is turned down for a very little. Mudie is a more liberal minded man, but Mr. Faux hopes to keep his library free from all books that parents think unsuitable for their daughters to

read. If you mean to publish a novel with a title like that you should feel a little nervous about Smith and Mudie."

I liked Byron's outspokenness and felt an intimacy springing up between me and this long-bodied, short-legged man with a cheerful rubicund face peering through a huge black beard. Perhaps the fellow feeling sprang from the fact that I had never seen anything like him before. However this may be, the words came to my lips easily which suggested that we should adjourn to an empty compartment yonder where we could talk at our ease. "Tinsley may be able to get your book past Mudie and Smith. If he does you will make money, for your book will attract, I hear that even from the title, but their money is in the thirty-one-and-sixpenny novel and it is a closed burrow. Even the two-volume novel enters with difficulty." "Good God," said I. "Mr. Tinsley told me he was going to give it to a reader on whose judgment he sets great reliance, and by the deletion of a few passages I may get it passed into both libraries." "But will they buy in sufficient numbers?" Byron asked. "I have another novel sketched out and all the characters decided on." "And what may the title be?" "*A Mummer's Wife*." "An excellent title but—" Byron became thoughtful and I waited. He said, "Drawing-rooms and actors are incompatible, and if Tinsley, after he has got his reader's report, decides that your book is too risky, I advise you to see Mr. Vizetelly about it."

"Mr. Vizetelly?" I said, "and who is he? His name is Italian." "Many generations back he was Italian, or Jew," Byron answered, "but he is an English writer and journalist. He was a correspondent of the *Times* when Queen Victoria went to visit the Empress Eugénie in the Tuilleries, and he was much appreciated. He is an author too. He has written some historical works. The story of *The Diamond Necklace* is a classic and will always be referred to when the story of the disappearance of the necklace comes to be talked about for one reason or another. Life, you see, is always a recurrence. A wheel has only a certain number of spokes and they come round in turn." This philosophical expression seemed strange on Byron's jovial visage, and thinking his mission with me finished he picked up his black bag containing manuscripts of the articles he had to read for the little journal he edited across the way. "But I must detain you, Mr. Webber. Do you know Mr. Vizetelly well, and if you do, will you give me a letter of introduction?" "Know him well, I have known him all my life. No introduction is needed. I am going home to Notting Hill. Do you go up Catherine Street and find him for yourself. Tell him you have come from France, where you lived ten or a dozen years. That will interest him. He will look upon you first perhaps as a translator—he is like a hawk, with fixed inquisitive eyes. As thin as a rake you will find him, too small for his clothes," and I went up the street trying to fill in the

sketch myself till I came to the number at which I had been told to call.

A clerk, who I discovered afterwards was his son, called up a tube and led me upstairs, and when the door was opened I saw an old man between sixty and seventy, truly gaunt and grey, and yet with a strange vitality in his eyes, which fixed themselves upon me. "Sit down, will you, sir. You have come to me about a manuscript?" "Yes, and no. I was advised to come to you to talk not of the story which I left with Mr. Tinsley, but of a story which I consider of greater importance," and whilst he listened I wondered, so like a relic of the Middle Ages he became at every moment, looking like an old engraving, and in imagination I saw him dressed in a long cloak trimmed with fur standing before a high desk writing a letter—so Holbein would certainly have painted him.\* I thought of Quintin Matsys' picture of two misers, one counting gold and the other reading from a ledger, but Quintin Matsys' version was crabbed, more archaic. Vize-telly kept Dürer in my mind, but I could not think of any picture in which Dürer would have utilized him. Yet I am sure Dürer would have utilized him. He would not have looked upon the narrow head, divided by a long gnarled nose, with eyes peering through spectacles steadfastly, without at least making a note of it in a sketch book.

\* The portrait of Erasmus by Holbein in the Louvre.

I noticed the worn shirt buttoned about his wrinkled throat and the black cloth jacket and loose shabby trousers falling with a suspicion of drapery about his long legs. He listened to me as if he were interested in what I said and asked me questions about Zola and Maupassant and the difficulty of the translation of certain words. "But," he said, "you have not come to talk to me about Zola, though perhaps later on I may have some questions to ask you about his life and work. I have published half a dozen of his novels and intend to publish them all." He passed across to me his catalogue, drawing my attention to the number of Zola's works he had published, and when I had looked through them and told him an old story about Alphonse Karr which of course he must have known since boyhood, "A polite old man," I said to myself, "as polite as a sixteenth century philosopher, full of formula and courtesy and intelligence that burns and gleams through his spectacles."

"So you have been in at Mr. Tinsley's," he said. "He has had great luck in his life but he has squandered his luck." I suggested that there were ups and downs in literature, but Vizetelly said, "To restore him to his former prosperity I am afraid we should have to remove the Gaiety Bar," and a faint smile passed over his parchment-like face, and he began to look to me in the grace of his age like a withered birch tree. "Not many years are before him, but I hope to publish with him," I thought,

and I complimented him on the success of *The Diamond Necklace* and he told me some interesting anecdotes about the year when he went to Paris as correspondent for the *Times*—how they had sawn three inches off the legs of one of the finest marqueterie tables of the great French designer of furniture whose name I have forgotten—Vizetelly had it on the tip of his tongue—the excuse being that Queen Victoria would need a table on which to rest her book when she retired to bed—for such a need as that a work of art was sacrificed. So prolific was the old man that I almost despaired, but he found an attentive listener, and at last said, “But I am detaining you, sir.”

“I came to tell you that I had another novel in my mind, the story of a mummer, the head of an opera company, who lodges at a linen draper’s shop and rescues the pretty draperess from selling reels of cotton and pocket handkerchiefs.” “He puts her on the stage,” Vizetelly interjected. “Yes.” “And in what town does all this happen?” “I hadn’t considered which town, somewhere in the north of England.” “A great deal of the success of your book depends upon the town and I hope you will make a significant choice. You must not rely on the luck of a chance thought, you must go in search of everything,” and as he spoke I foresaw myself spending the best part of three or four afternoons in the Gaiety Bar, encircled by mummers telling me the adventures that had befallen them.



A wonderful old man, truly, full of wisdom and experience, and the contrast between him and the commonplace Tinsley sent my thoughts wandering back to Zola's story of the ne'er-do-well who had found inspiration in his father's kitchen, and I began to regret that I had left my manuscript with a man who was no more than a literary cook. Tinsley had no confidence in me, all the confidence he had was in his power to cajole two stubborn librarians to subscribe for a book that they did not like. But Vizetelly was an historian as well as a journalist, he had written a book that would live in literature and he would be able to help me from time to time during the composition of *A Mummer's Wife*. Already he had given me the advice that I needed, and my thoughts again at wander, I said to myself, It is only from our fellow craftsmen that we can get help. He put his finger on the weak spot of my story. I should have found out sooner or later that I must have a town that lent itself to description, but how well he had explained it. "You cannot describe a turnip field, however great your powers of description may be—even Gautier could not do it," and I smiled, it was such a pleasure to find somebody in London who had even read Gautier, to say nothing of understanding him.

I crossed the street, thinking that perhaps I might hear of an ugly town without amusement of any sort in the Gaiety Bar. Vizetelly is right, the ugly is often more picturesque than the beautiful. But which town? After pushing through the swing doors my eyes lighted on a small man, a Jew, who without doubt was cast for comic parts, and thinking that he was as likely as another to understand my need I approached the group that he was addressing, but so appreciatively were his friends listening to him that I passed on, not liking to interrupt. He would think me a little mad to ask him to leave his friends and come and drink with me. But Byron knows them all, and he will introduce me to him, and perhaps he will be able to suggest a town in which to lay the scene of *A Mummer's Wife*.

In all these communings with myself I seemed to advance my story a little, and certain that it would be better for me to wait for Byron Webber's introduction to the mummers—Byron was always there between four and five o'clock after he had put up his pile of bricks, that was how he spoke of the article he wrote every week for the paper he edited—I went for a walk in the Strand. The next day I was in the Gaiety Bar in an unoccupied compartment waiting for Byron Webber, and for many days I returned to the bar during the luncheon hour and again in the afternoon and evening, so afraid was I of missing the burly Byron, and it was not until



the end of the week that he appeared, black beard and black bag. He seemed to be in search of something or somebody and I had to call him. "I have been here every day expecting to see you." "I have had a bad cold and my wife would not let me leave the house." Then followed the usual amenities, Won't you sit down? What will you have? Give it a name. Six out of the bottle since you are so kind, and when he had heard all that Vize-telly had told me, he said, "You want a town, ugly and dull, that would not excite the imagination even of George Borrow." "And who is George Borrow?" I asked, and all the time he spoke of George Borrow I watched the mummings come and go, hoping that Byron would call some of his friends over to drink with us. I mentioned to him that I would like to be introduced to a little Jew who, judging from his appearance, had been created by nature to play comic parts, and I pointed him out at the other end of the counter. "Ah, De Lange," said Byron, and being full of good nature Byron walked down the bar and hailed him, and after a little talk they returned bringing with them two or three other actors and a long lanky fellow who led the orchestra. Altogether we sat seven of us, the fat and the thin, the sallow and the flushed, the silent and the talkative, everyone drinking whisky and water except myself.

"From one or more of these gentlemen you will be able to learn all you need about the towns they visit in the

north of England. If I understand him right, and I think I do, the plot of his novel concerns the manager of an opera company who hears his landlady singing prettily on the staircase." This excited the company, and each waited impatiently for his turn to tell his story of the wooings of landladies in provincial towns. Mr. Cartwright, the tenor, listened in silence to these commonplace stories till at last, unable to keep silence any longer, he said, "I have had wooings, too, like any other man, but it was not about singing on the staircase that we came to an understanding, but at the breakfast table, when she said, 'I think you like fried eggs better than poached.' 'How do you know that?' I asked. 'Why, sir, when you were here a year ago you had fried eggs,' and marvelling at the compliment she paid me I took her hand, and that was all."

After the laughter provoked by this story a great bass voice came from De Lange. "I wonder whether Hanley would suit you?" "Is there anything distinctive in Hanley, or is it no more than bricks and mortar, like the towns the other gentlemen have described?" "Hanley is a pottery town where they make thousands of plates and basins and chamber pots, all kinds of common china put to common uses." "And did you go through the potteries?" "No, I didn't, but the company did." "Players strolling through a world of work," said I. "I must see Hanley. Thank you, and if Hanley does not suit I will try further afield." Byron, who seemed to know everything and

everybody, gave me a letter of introduction to the proprietor of the theatre. De Lange said, "I can do that. What he wants is an introduction to the pretty draperess."

On this De Lange rose to join his companions at the counter and Byron and I returned to Charing Cross. "Many thanks for all you have done for me, Mr. Byron Webber, you have saved my book. Hanley will, I think, suit my purpose excellently well. Good-bye, I shall start to-morrow, and when I return I shall have the pleasure, I hope, of recounting to you my impressions of Hanley and perhaps of a pretty draperess."

The porter helped me to find a train and next morning I was on my way to Hanley, a three hours journey, and as I watched the Midlands flowing by, pastoral and beautiful, my thoughts were with a world of work. The draperess will go with the manager. There was his name to be thought of, and I had no name for him that was at once commonplace and, like Hanley, picturesque. Kate Ede seemed to be a name for her, but for the manager I could think of nothing better than Dick Lennox, and what, I asked myself, can happen to these twain as they wander through the store-rooms laden with domestic china? I cudgelled my brains in vain, and on leaving the station I saw nothing but ordinary streets, and I was disappointed, but when I had left my trunk at the hotel and set forth to explore, Hanley took shape and form. The very town, I said, for Kate Ede to meet Dick Lennox.

A town built upon a hill is Hanley, surrounded by a valley on all sides but one, with an enchanting view of misty hills far away. My draperess, I said, will come to the top of Market Street to meditate and to hope that Dick will lodge at her house when the company returns to Hanley. The blue hills will raise her above herself. She will melt into reveries. But why should I describe Hanley in this little book? Hanley is described in *A Mummer's Wife* to the admiration of Arnold Bennett, who more than once has written that it revealed to him the fictional possibilities of the five towns.

For nearly a week I went out with a notebook in hand, begging as usual my eyes not to forget what they might never see again. I wandered through the potteries and again and again up Market Street. The evenings I spent behind the scenes of the theatre enjoying the company of the mummerys, and such pleasant people did I find them that I could not bear to part from them, and I travelled with the second company of the *Cloches de Corneville* to some town, the name of which I have forgotten. Even two journeys did not satisfy me. We visited several towns and at last, brimming with slang and theatre lore, I returned to London to meet Mr. Tinsley, who had written to tell me that he was prepared to publish *A Modern Lover* if I would agree to make good any loss he might incur in the publication—that is, if Mudie and Smith refused to add the book to their libraries or bought too few

copies to defray the expenses of printers' bills. But how am I to know what loss he may incur? He may tell me that Mudie took sixty copies and Smith twenty-five. I cannot afford to lose money now, with Joe clamouring to give up my agency. *Il faut toujours oser, mais il faut savoir oser*, and after some correspondence and a few visits I agreed to pay forty pounds if my book did not prove successful.

"I am going to Ireland to-night and shall return to London in about a month. I suppose the printer will go on with the setting and will have half the book set when I come back. I shall not want the proofs sent to Dublin for I have my agent's accounts to look into and I have a new book in my head which I would like to give my mind to on the journey." When I had left Mr. Tinsley's office, rather perturbed at making myself liable for the printing of a book, I stopped at the telegraph office to send messages to my mother and to Joe Blake.

## II V

And the Irish Sea being quiet, I was able all the way from Holyhead to Kingstown to weigh the pros and the cons: whether I should be my mother's guest or lodge in an hotel. She had come up from Moore Hall for a change, weary of the solitude of the country, or mayhap to see her relatives, cousins all, alien to me, a different race from the Moores, and as their names came up in my mind I foreheard their gossip and foresaw myself stealing out of the drawing-room, angering them, annoying my mother, who would read me a curtain lecture when her guests had left. The word contempt was in my mind constantly. "Contempt, Mother," I heard myself answering, "I cannot sit in your drawing-room saying nothing. There is more contempt in silence than in retreat." My mind changed every few minutes, and when a mile out from Kingstown it was not yet decided whether I should tell the jarvey to drive to the Shelbourne Hotel or to 22 Merrion Square. It happened almost without my knowing it that I told the jarvey to drive to Merrion Square, but no sooner had I given the address than I regretted it. But it was now too late for a change of mind, and for three days I bore with Galway and Mayo till on the third

day I felt that if Joe Blake did not choose to come up from Mayo before the end of the week I would return to London. But on the day decided for my clandestine departure the sun was shining so prettily that I felt I must go out and see Dublin once again, now clothed with blue air as soft as silk.

Three doors away an enchantment awaited me, a great pear tree flowering from the area to the top windows. A lovely decoration, I said, for a Georgian house; and facing the National Gallery I stopped to admire a piece of ornamental stonework with a niche in it, designed to hold a statue probably, though the statue was absent, or maybe designed to conceal the back yard of the keeper's lodge. I would have liked to linger to inquire the matter out, but my head was full of *A Mummer's Wife* and I had brought a notebook in which I looked forward to sketching the first chapters, in scenario of course. As I passed on my way to Stephen's Green I noticed that many of the beautiful houses built at the beginning of the century were already turned into offices. Land agitation had driven the aristocracy out of them, and with the ascendancy class gone everything beautiful in Ireland would soon be a recollection of past days never to return.

The steps that lead to the hall doors of Merrion Square are not more than a few inches above the street, but in Stephen's Green they rise to ten feet and are flanked by lanterns of old time. Besides its steps, Stephen's Green

had many advantages over Merrion Square. In Merrion Square the gardens were well kept and flowers did not lack in the parterres, but Stephen's Green, which I remembered as a wild savage field with grass in patches and stunted hawthorns, had been remodelled, and with excellent taste, by Lord Ardilaun, who sat on a high pedestal brooding probably on the money that would be needed to make the Green worthy of the houses that surrounded it. He deserved his statue. The parterres and swards cost him a few barrels of Guinness but the brimming lake and the bridge and the cascade leaping from rock to rock must have cost many thousands.

The bridge hastened my steps, for I looked forward to watching the different movements of the water-fowl paddling in and out of the sedges or rising in flight to cross the city and fly no one knows whither. Lord Ardilaun had a taste for building, and he knew it. I heard him once speak of himself, ironically of course, as the Irish Cheops. His castle at Cong is an anachronism—no one can build a castle in the nineteenth century—but do thou think only with gratitude of Lord Ardilaun. He deserved thanks for what he did for Dublin and he got none, and the morality that I deduced that morning from his Green was, "Do the best for yourself and you will be loved, do good to others and they will detest you."

But there was more to see in the Green than the bridge and the cascade. Blackbirds ran across the swards, thrushes



trilled from the high branches, sparrows collected screaming in a tree and went off in great batches. A duck pursued by two amorous drakes amused me. The duck was willing to accept either suitor, and seeing that one drake could run faster than the other she stopped to give him his chance, and I thought that a happy union was about to be accomplished, but the second drake hurried up in time to stop it, and when I tried to intervene to help the duck who might have been happy with either, all three flew away and I knew no more of them. But have I not described the amours of this duck and the two drakes before? Was it in dream or was it imagination? I don't know, but I must beware or severe critics will cite the two versions and declare I am making a compilation from my voluminous writings. I remember everything until I write it. Once I write it I forget.

After a little while I looked up and whom should I see coming up the shelving sward but Joe Blake. The servant at 22 has told him that he would be likely to find me in the Green, said I to myself, and involuntarily I disliked him, for he seemed a pure Blake, a long dark face with a lengthy nose and a gait that reminded me of a rook stalking in quest of food. Amused at the analogy I continued. A rook that has come upon a dead fowl, pluck, pluck, pluck. I am the dead fowl, so he thinks. "So there you are, George. The servant told me that I should find you in the Green, writing your novel, I suppose, for the sake

of which I postponed giving up my agency three or four months ago. I didn't want to bring you over to Dublin, for that would distract you, and so I waited as long as I dared, and I would have waited longer and perhaps continued the agency if the country was not getting more and more out of hand," and he began to repeat to me the story how he had had to lock himself into the high-walled garden to escape from the tenants that had come up from different parts of the country. "I hear," said I, a little diffident about plunging straight away into the question of the accounts, "I hear that Parnell has established himself as King of Ireland." "It amounts nearly to that and the only chance I see of getting rents is to divide the tenants by offering large reductions. These will be accepted by some and refused by others." "In the familiar phrase, a rift will be in the lute," I added. "I should have been here three days ago but for lameness in a near foreleg in Balinasad, which kept me in Mayo. I wished to be there when the veterinary surgeon arrived," and to ingratiate myself with Joe, for I noticed that he was trying to ingratiate himself with me and I thought that I might outdo him in the line of cajolery, I told him that I knew something of horses' forelegs. "Your father did," he answered, "he believed in firing them, but firing has gone out of fashion. Any good purpose it effected was due to the long rest you had to give the horse after the operation." "And what did the veterinary surgeon say, Joe?"

“Oh, the old story of a suspensory ligament,” and we talked of suspensory ligaments and back sinews for a little while till I vexed Joe by speaking of his racecourse as rough fields that would be likely to break down any horse. “There is nothing wrong with the racecourse,” he said, “as you will see when you come down to Balinacfad, for I suppose you are coming to Mayo after you have signed the accounts.” “As soon as I have got another agent I will come. But Joe, you are not really serious about giving up this agency?” “Oh yes, I am. I have had some narrow escapes which I will tell you about when we have discussed the matter for which we met.” It was a relief to talk business at last and I said, “You have brought the accounts with you, Joe?” “Yes,” he said, “they are at my hotel.” “If you like we will go down and fetch them,” I answered, and we walked down Kildare Street talking of the difficulty of finding an agent in Dublin at that time. He mentioned a man whom he could recommend to me, but Joe’s recommendation did not mean much to me, and I said, “The first thing to do will be to go through the accounts and I will put them in the hands of my solicitor, who will employ a chartered accountant. I suppose I owe you a great deal of money. Something you said in your letter led me to think that I do.” “Yes, you owe me money, and as soon as you get an agent who understands peasants better than I do the money will be collected.” “But who should understand peasants better

than you?" "I would continue the agency if I dared," and seeing that nothing more was to be done with him I asked him to go upstairs and fetch the accounts, which he did, and I took them casually as if I were not interested in them, and listened to his advice. "I would like to remind you, George, that accountants charge heavy fees for their services." "Well, that is part of the game, Joe, accounts can't be signed unless they are examined." "You are right, it is only that I would save you heavy losses. The money is all on the property and has only got to be collected." What he meant I did not understand, but I took the account books, opened one, and as it seemed to me to have been made out by an ignorant man, I just rolled up the papers and said, "I will take them to my solicitor in Dame Street. You will find my mother at 22 Merrion Square and a horde of relations around her, all anxious to hear whether you are running a horse at Baldoyle, and they will all be there."



My mother asked me if I had seen Joe and I said "Yes, he discovered me in Stephen's Green. He told me about his horses, and we talked about Parnell and the tenants that refuse to pay any rents and of things that I don't understand and don't care to understand." "That is very wrong of you, George, you should try to understand your property and manage it." "I am trying to understand my property. I cannot do more than take my agent's accounts to my solicitor, who will go through them himself first and then pass them on to a chartered accountant." "There are many ways of examining accounts, of course. A chartered accountant's business is to pick holes in accounts." "No, Mother, there is only one way of examining accounts, through a public accountant, otherwise there would be no use in having accounts. Surely that is clear to you?" My mother said, "If you wish to start a lawsuit against Joe, I wish you had never come to my house. It would have been better if you had gone to an hotel." "Indeed, Mother, I often thought that, but came because it seemed unkind not to come since you had invited me."

The bickerings continued, three weeks would have to elapse, and they passed very unpleasantly for both of us,

Mother and I. There was little else in our minds. Whenever we met, if we did not speak of Joe and the accounts, our faces spoke for us, and so the time passed until at last the solicitor wrote to say that I should find him in his office at eleven o'clock one morning. My mother asked me where I was going, and I said, "I have got an appointment with the solicitor. When I return you shall hear all about it, a truthful report, Mother."

I had expected that the accountant would find many discrepancies in Joe's accounts, but he did more, he disapproved of them altogether, and told the solicitor that he would advise Mr. Moore not to sign. "And I endorse all he says," the lawyer added. "The only way to end the matter is for you to instruct me to write a letter to Mr. Blake, telling him that, under legal advice, you decline to sign the accounts." "But it will bring an action," I said. "Ah, we don't know what he will do." "Are the accounts falsified?" I asked. "I cannot go into details like that, my advice to you is not to sign the accounts." "And if I do sign the accounts, what will happen then?" "Immediately you sign the accounts Mr. Blake will ask you to mortgage your property for two or three thousand pounds. You will be a hundred and fifty a year poorer than you are to-day." "Well," I said, "I am engaged in writing a novel. One has been accepted, the other is in my head being composed day by day. I intend to give my life up to letters and it is impossible for me to do this if

I engage in a lawsuit with my uncle. The lawsuit would change my life from end to end, all my ideas of things would disappear, I would no longer be myself. I don't know if you understand, but it is quite clear to me. I am sorry I cannot accept your advice. I wish to be free, and the only way I can obtain freedom is to cut myself from this accursed estate." "The estate is more sure than your books, Mr. Moore, though I am sure that anything you write —" "Hush, I do not come here for compliments, I have simply come to tell you that I intend to cut myself adrift. My life will be happier and more successful." "If you are decided, here are the accounts, sign." I signed, and just as the solicitor had anticipated, a letter came from Joe Blake asking me to mortgage my estate for three thousand pounds, which I did, and my mother was overjoyed when I brought her the news.

"We have escaped a horrible scandal," she said, "and your books will make up the three thousand pounds quite easily. You will not be a penny the worse." "And I shall have provided the Browns and the Blakes and the Dolphins with endless gossip." "And now, George, where are you going? Will you stay longer in Dublin?" "No, I cannot afford it. I am a poorer man than I was. I must try to make up the three thousand pounds, and I can only do that in London." "But who will supply you with money to live in London?" "My financial arrangements have been completed, Mother." "And how were they

completed?" "Well," I said, "the Ruttledges are our nearest neighbours and Tom Ruttledge wants to be married." "You mean that fellow with long legs and a round head who smokes cigars in the drawing-room and rides steeplechases and is a disappointment to his mother? You are not thinking of giving him the agency?" "Mother, say nothing against Tom Ruttledge. I said nothing about Joe Blake when you made him my agent in my minority." "But is Tom going to advance money, and where is the money to come from?" "Tom tells me that the woods have not been thinned round Moore Hall for the last thirty years. He has had them examined by a timber merchant, who will pay four hundred pounds for the surplus trees. The woods will be not spoilt but benefited." "And you will live, George, in London for two years on four hundred pounds?" "I hope to do so. The trees of Moore Hall shall not be wasted, that I promise you, Mother, and you can live at Moore Hall as long as it pleases you and invite your friends to keep you company."



## VI

Three days afterwards I wrote to my brother, who had lodgings in Cecil Street, Strand, offering to pay him a guinea a week for his spare room. "I shall be in all day writing a book and shall not interfere with you," and no man was ever more faithful to a promise made to myself rather than to my brother, for I could not put aside the thought that solitude and privation were as much needed by a man of letters as pen, ink and paper. And it was only because I did not wish to chagrin my brother that I sometimes consented to accompany him to a fashionable restaurant where he dined with prize fighters and young lords whose only interests in life were champagne, comic songs and chorus girls. However much I might try, I could not associate myself intimately with this company. I felt that the bluster and bluff of the restaurant turned my thoughts from the pages I had written and from those that I hoped to write on the following day. I wondered how this was, and at last discovered myself to be irreparably aesthetic, which explained my aversion from my Galway cousins and the lords who drank champagne at Romano's.

Augustus had friends in the country with whom he ordinarily spent Saturday and Sunday, and he once persuaded me to come with him to Sussex, where there were tennis courts and rabbit shooting, and I tried to please, but I was not much success with this family. They preferred Augustus and I did not return to Sussex, nor did I follow him when he asked me to dine with him at Romano's. "You had better come," he said, "you will not write well when you are tired," but Augustus's friends were so different from me that I said, "Well, Augustus, you had better go your way and I will go mine, our ways do not meet," and whilst he went off dressed in his fashionable clothes to Romano's I walked up the street to Simpson's, a great restaurant where one could dine off an excellent shoulder of mutton for half-a-crown. Celery and cheese were offered to the customer as a relish, and when the waiter asked "What will you take to drink, sir?" the customer answered, even when he was myself, a pint of bitter. Ale in the early eighties cost fourpence a pint. The price and the bite in the throat are remembered by me, also that dining at Simpson's meant living above the rate that I had prescribed to myself, and one evening on paying the bill and giving threepence to the waiter I resolved that I would not again indulge myself in a dinner at Simpson's but would dine next evening at Gatti's, opposite Charing Cross, where the best loin chop in London, or the best steak, cooked to perfection, could be

had with fried potatoes, a cup of *café au lait* and a roll and butter, for a shilling, the only extra being a penny for the waiter.

And the dinner finished, between eight and nine it behoved me to decide whether I would spend the rest of the evening in a music hall listening to McDermot singing the popular ditties for which I had lost all stomach, or in theatres given over to the art of farce, or call a hansom and drive to St. James's Hall for classical music. Classical music is the only relaxation for the tired brain, I said to myself. I am naturally inclined to the serious, the trivial bores me. For a moment I thought I should finish my evening listening to Wagner's *Valkyrie*, but I lacked courage, St. James's Hall seemed far away, the crowd was provocative of analysis. I tried to read the character of the passers-by. The women interested me more than the men, for they were easily read, women come up from the suburbs, Jennies in search of kisses and guineas—an odious phrase from a poet that I once admired. At length a pleasant girl looked at me with eyes not too full of invitation, and daring the porter whose business it was to keep the doorway free from loiterers, she asked me to come for a walk with her. I thanked her to save her from coarse reproof by the porter, crossed Trafalgar Square by myself and was glad to pass through the great iron gates in search of darkness and solitude.

Wherever there was a bench it was occupied by boys

and girls, and being an inverted moralist I commented sympathetically on the whispered words that floated above the bashfulness of the girls and the ardour of the boys, both equally exalted by the quiet and the hush of sunset in the western sky. Exaltations, I said, that they will never know again. A year or two of aspiration, almost of poetry, and then a long life of work, toiling behind counters and in factories, in teashops attending on clerks coming for a hasty meal. And what business is it of mine, I asked myself, to pity them? They live the life they were born into and the world has always been like that and always will be, no better and no worse.

As I was indulging in these commonplaces and reproaching myself at the same moment for so doing, somebody spoke, and turning I saw the girl who had invited me to come for a walk in St. James's Park. A parlour maid out of place I judged her to be, a girl who would have suited me for a walk as far as Buckingham Palace on any other night but this. But I was pleased at being accosted, though I had to send her away. Every man, I suppose, likes to be accosted if he is certain that he is not observed, and there was no danger of being observed at that hour in St. James's Park. The shadows of the great trees looming up hid every obscenity—I use the word in its grammatical sense—from the passers-by, if any were being committed, and having bidden Margaret good-bye, urging that I had serious matters to consider, I began to

wonder whether I was really churlish by nature or merely playing a part, and then, feeling that I must excuse myself to myself for my involuntary virtue, I meditated on the recompense that I should have been obliged to give the girl if I had wasted her time walking as far as Buckingham Palace with me, relieving with pleasant trivial chatter my almost intolerable boredom. Association with harlots is incompatible with an income of two hundred a year, and virtue apart, I could not afford it, and all thought of her passing suddenly out of my mind I watched a flight of ducks coming down from the sky with necks outstretched just as in a Japanese print.

And as they came with rapid wing-beats I thought their intention was to pass over St. James's Park northward to the lakes of Regent's Park, but whatever it was they changed it, and wheeling almost in a circle they alighted on the lake in front of me with a flutter of wings, to swim towards the reeds of the island, leaving long trails of light behind them. So still was the night that I could hear them chatter good-night to each other before they tucked their heads under their wings for sleep. There was light enough to distinguish the different species, and I noted the common wild duck, which crowds in thousands on Lough Carra, and there were some teal, and then came the widgeon and another and other tribes of duck, a sheldrake or two, but the light was beginning to fail and I could not distinguish the plumage and so

contented myself with a comment on the morality of ducks. They are subject to a morality just as we are, not the same morality, but another; which is better and which is worse I am not pious enough to decide; and my thoughts turning from the ducks to myself I moralized : the Providence that rules over this world has ordered a pleasanter life for ducks than for men, to mate and to swim together, two ducks for one drake, and should a third duck approach it is the custom of the drake to drive her away. He does not want more, two are enough for him, whereas men and women are more like barn-door cocks and hens, they weary of each other. And with these words a great sadness came over me. I too would like a mate, but a mate and the writing of books are incompatible, Balzac has said so.

I continued my walk along the lake-shore, up the acclivity that leads to the broad terrace in front of Buckingham Palace, and once more I stopped to look back on the lake, but a long dead day obscured it from me, and I could only see myself starting from the Rue de la Tour des Dames with Paul Alexis for the Gare St. Lazare. Zola had invited us both to Médan to spend the day with him, and I saw myself setting forth with Alexis on a beautiful summer morning under a blue sky. The great house that the novelist had built for himself was some distance from the station. We had to cross fields all in flower, and during our walk I could see the flowers and hear myself

telling Alexis of my projects for different novels. The good Alexis listened patiently to my recitation, but he could not refrain from a sly gibe when I had finished. "I see that you are devising a little Rougon-Macquart series." The gibe cut quick. Was I doing no more than that? I asked myself, and I don't think I spoke to him again until we reached Médan, where we found Zola in his great studio lying on the sofa with proofs before him. He said he had a quarrel to pick with me for some remarks I had made about him in the *Indépendante*. "In view of these remarks I cannot write the preface that I promised you and Charpentier for *A Mummer's Wife*." Alexis intervened and took my part and in my dream I heard his very words, "Why not answer the criticism?" "Oh, no," said Zola, "I cannot answer anybody now, I have passed beyond the years of defence." I felt I had made a fool of myself and I remember Paul Alexis's words which he uttered when Zola had left the room. "Don't press him to write a preface. He'll not write it. His mind is made up. It was very unkind towards Zola and unkind to Charpentier, *qui va boire un bouillon*." I could not deny the truth of what he said. My cheek must have blanched, my heart certainly misgave me when Zola returned to us and began to read aloud to Alexis what I had written in the *Indépendante*. The good Alexis took up the position that the passages he had read aloud were but an innocent polemic. "*Mon cher Moore, je vous tien-*

*drai sur la sellette plus tard.*" "Good God," I said to myself, "I thought it was all over but he is going to start again . . . *et en le creusant.*"

We sat down soon afterwards to breakfast and after breakfast we walked in the garden talking of indifferent things, and it was not until we returned to the studio that he said, "*Je ne me plains pas, mon cher. Les enfants dévorent le parent toujours.*" Another phrase that Zola used was about a change of opinion. "*En moi une opinion est comme un gros meuble qui se déplace difficilement.*" "*Mon cher maître, je n'ai pas discuté les grandes lignes de la composition. La composition est toujours impeccable, comme celle de Wagner.*" Dropping the *Indépendante* upon his knee, settling his glasses upon his nose and looking at me with a fixed stare, Zola said, in the detached manner which always drew me to him affectionately, "I regret you did not go further and attack French literature *de fond en comble*, you would have raised a polemic. You did not go far enough, or you went too far." "Too far?" I said. "Yes," he replied, "what you say about Goncourt will prevent you from ever returning to the *grénier* in Auteuil." I hope, said I to myself, that this trial is ended now and that we shall talk upon some subject on which we are more or less agreed. Madame Zola's presence will prevent a wrangle, and perhaps it was on her account that Zola led the conversation into English literature and asked me to name the great writers that



we appreciated. Before I had time to answer, Zola said, "We know Shakespeare in translation and we know Milton too in translation, but who is the third? Name your trinity." "That is easily done," I said. "Three great writers wrote in English. Two you have mentioned. The third is Walter Savage Landor."

Neither Zola nor Alexis had heard the name and they were anxious to get an account of his work, and I felt a little disappointment fall upon them when I said, "His work consists almost entirely of dialogues with the dead. The Greek dialogues have been reproached as being more Roman than Greek, but I do not agree with that. In these dialogues he wrote with the whole English language and with knowledge of Greek and Latin. He was a bi-linguist, writing in Latin and in English, and I am afraid if I tell you that he criticized minutely some of Cicero's Latin, giving his reasons, that you will look upon Landor as a pedant, but there was no pedant in him." "Tell us about some piece that he wrote that obtains your entire approval, which you would quote if you were asked to select a piece for French translation." "I can mention one," I answered, "and I do not think you would find anything more noble, pregnant with a more universal humanity that lives on from Greek times to the present day than this dialogue, only two pages and a half long, and yet we feel in reading it that he has told the history of the whole world. The dialogue is carried on between Achilles and

Helen—he has come to meet Helen on Mount Ida. The flexibility of the English language and the power of it are here expressed, if not more fully than in Milton, I would say more enchantingly. We are lifted beyond ourselves listening to these two great figures that stand on the very ridge of the world and talk of simple things and great things with the same ease. Achilles knows the names of the flowers and the herbs at his feet and he brings them into the conversation with an art that I can only say is incomparable.” “Have his dialogues,” Zola asked, “anything comparable with the dialogues of Plato?” “They are as beautiful as the dialogues of Plato, and like all things beautiful they are eternal. Time cannot efface them or Plato. Yet Landor detested Plato and criticized him in some of his dialogues unjustly. Landor was a great pagan, but whilst a pagan he would retain *un petit coin bleu*, your very phrase, dear master, a reproach that you addressed to Renan.” “And would you place him higher than Renan.” “Yes, I admire Renan, but there was a good deal of the woman, or if not of the woman, of the ecclesiastic in Renan. But Landor was the eternal masculine, eternal, for in a thousand years he will be the same as to-day, as long as the English language exists, and by that time he will be in all languages.”

I translated the celebrated epigram: “*Je n’ai jamais lutté avec personne, personne valait la peine. J’aimais la nature, et après la nature, l’art. J’ai chauffé les mains*

*devant le feu de la vie, et maintenant je suis prêt à partir.*" "C'est très beau," Zola murmured reflectively, "and it must be incomparable in English when it resists a spontaneous translation, deprived of rhyme and of metre."

Availing herself of a sudden pause, Madame Zola, who was getting tired of the conversation, said, "I am afraid you have missed the train at Médan. You will have to walk to —" and she named a station three miles away at which, if we walked quickly, we would catch a train. "We have stopped too long and worn out your patience," I said, apologizing to Madame Zola, who declared that she had never spent a pleasanter evening. The night was fine, and as we walked through endless meadows Alexis said, "I regret that you permitted your pen to run into criticism of Zola's style, thereby forfeiting the preface that he promised to you and Charpentier. *"Cela fait tort à Zola, mais c'est Charpentier qui va boire un bouillon."* That damned *bouillon*, said I to myself. "A man cannot do more than regret and express his sorrow. *J'ai courbé l'échine et vous m'avez fouetté. Ne parlons plus de cet article malheureux,*" and kind and good Alexis, to soothe me, asked me to speak about Landor. "I improvised for a few moments as well as your language would allow me." "And for a moment I could see," Alexis said, "dimly of course, but I could see the two colossal figures that loom up high as the stars in history." "Alexis, I have awakened the poet in you. You would hear me say a few words

more about Landor. He is a beautiful austerity, always beautiful and nearly always austere, even in his comedies. The landscape before us represents him—the dark earth and the light sky and the austere poplars reaching up to the first stars. Appreciate the austerity and the beauty and you will know more of Landor than I can tell you.”

## VII

The days went by, leaving me almost daily exhausted in an attempt to disentangle some knot that had come into the skein unexpectedly. I went out to walk distracted by the thought that I would have to abandon *A Mummer's Wife*, saying to myself, It cannot be written, it cannot be written; but next morning the knot disentangled itself and I proceeded without difficulty into three or four pages of narrative. In these monotonous days, in which every hour reminded me of my growing desire of truancy from my desk, not truancy, but a holiday that my health needed, there was a distraction, but it was one I could willingly have done without, for when wearied even to the point of feeling that I could not continue writing another day about mummers and their monetary difficulties, I was reminded of my own. I owed forty pounds, the sum which I had agreed to pay to Tinsley if Mudie and Smith did not subscribe enough to defray the cost of publication of *A Modern Lover*.

Months went by, and Tinsley did not send in his bill of costs. He must have published some novel of great

success, a novel of popular appeal, and did not want money—the only explanation I could find for his reticence in sending in his account, but one day the letter arrived. Forty pounds due to Tinsley, and the pen dropped from my hand. How the money was to be paid I did not know without breaking my promise to Tom Rutledge, and the whole afternoon went by in vacancy until my brother Augustus came in. I showed him the letter, and he said in his airy way, “Oh, this is nothing. You haven’t noticed perhaps that he does not send in his account. I know a genial Jew who will just write to him for his accounts and if they are not right he will make it the temperature of a red-hot poker for Mr. Tinsley.” This was Augustus’s fanciful way of speaking and I left the matter in his hands. I acted with judgment, for I was prompted by my instinct. A few days afterwards he told me that Jimmy Davis had written to Tinsley, who had replied, “Let Mr. Moore pay the money he owes me and then we will go into accounts.” A very innocent letter this appeared to Augustus for a publisher to write to an author, almost childish. Tinsley must be drifting into his second childhood. “But I have signed for the money,” I said. “Tinsley’s stock was stored in a warehouse fully insured, and the warehouse has been burnt with the stock, therefore Tinsley was paid through the insurance and you owe him nothing.” A great weight was lifted from me, my depression vanished like a fog. A breeze had

come and lifted it above the housetops and I was myself again. "You will hear no more from Tinsley," Augustus called back from the door, and I continued my manuscript, thinking from time to time that I could now afford a holiday, for two-thirds of *A Mummer's Wife* was finished, and I fell to wondering whether forty pounds would pay my expenses to Ireland and back. Luck when it comes does not abandon a man quickly, and not long after this Byron Webber came knocking at my door to ask me if I would write a few articles on painting for his paper, for which he would pay three pounds apiece. I answered, "These articles will take my mind away from my book, but I want a holiday and I will write them," and I wrote them and received about twelve pounds in return, and on these proceeds and the forty pounds from which my brother had redeemed me I started on my holiday.

In Moore Hall I could take a holiday writing at my ease, and being a late riser I never was at my writing-table till eleven o'clock, but I did not eat luncheon and after two or three o'clock I was on the back of a large brown horse seventeen or eighteen hands high, difficult to mount on account of his height, riding about fields that I had known in my early life, or shooting ducks with a Scotch farmer who lived near us, an excellent shot. We were nearly drowned swimming out to an island where we hoped to meet the ducks coming in to preen them-

selves, but that is another story. There was some more shooting and some more writing and at last my stay prolonged itself to three months, during which I finished *A Mummer's Wife* and sent it to Vizetelly.

At last the proofs came in, and what was more important than the proofs, cuttings from the papers saying that a new voice had come into literature, that nothing had been written with the same force as *A Mummer's Wife* for many a day. These inflamed me, and I resisted my mother's invitation to remain on. "You have seen Moore Hall under its most unfavourable aspect. The beauty of Moore Hall is in its trees and the pink buds of the beech are unclosing. Stay another month and you will see my garden in bloom." "But Mother, I want to see the Press in bloom recording my name as an English writer," and regardless of her lamentations I said, "I must go, Mother, I am called," and I crossed to London and with my scanty luggage arrived at Vizetelly's office.

"Thank you, Mr. Vizetelly," I said, for sending me the notices of the *Athenaeum* and the *London News*"—and there were half a dozen other notices he had sent me, all praising *A Mummer's Wife*. "You are now," he said, "accepted as the coming novelist with a new manner of writing. Your future is assured if you use it properly," he added. "Use it properly?" said I. "I have got a new book in my head called *Muslin*." "A prettier title it would be in French than in English," he replied, and I



proceeded to interrupt the old man in his endless correspondence with authors with a detailed account of *Muslin*, to which he gave a somewhat dry reply. "I think your forte is rather among the lower classes than the upper." But I am gentry, said I to myself, and I shall be able to write about gentry, and Vizetelly, guessing my thoughts, said, "It is the gentry who write best about the lower classes." "But how about the sales?" I asked, "the sales are not on a par with the reviews." "I have one hundred pounds to give you, and I will give it you now."

One hundred pounds in my poverty seemed like manna falling from heaven, and feeling that I could not return to my brother I took two rooms in Danc's Inn. Detestable rooms they were, but I was used to hardship, and determined not to run into debt I undertook with my brother to write the lyrics of the *Cloches de Corneville* and I did some journalism, and to save money I went down to Sussex to live—not with friends who had a pretty Italian house built under ilex trees and who would have been glad to receive me, for with the father and the mother and the two young ladies and the young man I was on friendly terms—but on a green in rooms let by a woman above her shop, and there I wrote some articles on Ireland for the *Figaro* and began *Confessions of a Young Man*, which to-day finds readers. And it is rare, I prided myself as I wrote this line, that a book finds readers after six months.

*Muslin* was a moderate success and the *Confessions of a Young Man* was a real success. Everybody liked it. "I hope your next book will be written with the same gaiety and in the same style as *Confessions*," Vizetelly said. "You will not return to the manner of *A Mummer's Wife*, I hope." Hating advice, I replied, "I shall return to whatever instinct prompts."

*From this point the text was not revised by the author.*

## VIII

An hour later, I bethought myself of the lake and the park, and how pleasant a stroll would be, and I went forth and admired all I saw, but my thoughts were scattered. Mudie and Smith have now banned four of my books, *A Modern Lover*, *A Mummer's Wife*, *Muslin* and the *Confessions*, and I began to think I might have done better to have perfected my knowledge of French and remained in France. The censorship must be broken. Henley had talked to me of three more books, but who can say that he has courage to write three more books as long as *A Mummer's Wife*. "Not I! Not I!" cried I, and turning I retraced my steps, thinking that a walk in St. James's Park was a little sad and that I was of Johnson's opinion when he said to Boswell, "Where shall we go for a walk, Boswell? I know no pleasanter place than Fleet Street," and they walked that morning in Fleet Street; and I shall walk in it to-day although I have no purpose in view. And I fell to thinking that there is nothing in this world more lonely than an author without a subject. To dispel the gloom that was beginning to settle upon me I bought a newspaper and read as I walked, jostling the passengers; I heard mutterings behind me, but I did not mind them, for I was interested

in the article that I was reading—an article on servants. The author had the courage to ask the readers of the hour if they ever thought of the manifold services that we demanded of servants, to the performance of which we summoned them by bell-pulls. I heard them in my thoughts mutter in the pantry and the kitchen, “Ah! that’s the old girl’s bell again, her bell is very lively this morning.” But I did not pursue the servants to the upper floors of the house. My thoughts had galloped away on something that looked like an inspiration from the Muses. I was asking myself if servants, who in English literature are never introduced except as comic characters, might not be treated as the principal characters of a novel. After all, they are human beings like ourselves, though reduced by riches to a sort of partial slavery. Before I reached St. Clement Danes in the Strand I was asking myself whether the hero of my new book should be a footman or should I take a cook for a heroine, and before I reached the Law Courts I decided that it could be neither. A footman would not be a pleasing object in the love passages and it is hard to think of a good-tempered cook, though no doubt there are such beings. A cook is too old, but not a scullery-maid. Ah, there I have it! A scullery-maid, said I, she shall be. And I asked, What is the story of this scullery-maid? An illegitimate child is her misfortune. The father is the footman, and both are dismissed. There is hardly enough

in that for a novel; I have related it to myself, and insipid it certainly is. But if the footman were carried off by one of the young ladies in the drawing-room and the unfortunate girl left to bring up her child on £18 a year. Such is the price of human flesh in our admirable city of London. My father bred and raced horses; a racing stable would make an admirable background in keeping with the subject of my story. I should have to draw portraits of jockeys and trainers, but they would be only accessories; the principal figure would be the indomitable mother who will sacrifice her life for her child. And I stopped, surprised at the admirable subject that Chance had given me. Chance indicates the subject, the necessary hint we do not find in our thoughts, but come upon unexpectedly on our way, and develop as we walk. George Eliot sought a subject in Hetty Sorrel's murder of her child. A woman's moulding of the subject, a true moulding, would be Hetty living to save her child. Women bear the world on their shoulders when they lack that eternal instinct of motherhood that pervades the world from end to end, and perhaps extends to the furthest star. We owe a great deal to Hetty Sorrel, but the name is trivial. I want a graver name, and it will come during the course of the writing. I stopped to think that I might better consider my subject, which seemed to me the greatest that had ever been treated in literature. And I shall see a great deal more in it than I do to-day; it will unfold;

and again I was a happy poet returning to his lodging to lose himself in his subject, whether in meditation or in taking notes, I know not. I shall have to drop into long meditations. It seemed that difficulties and trouble insurmountable loomed up; I could perceive them faintly in the mist of the months, perhaps years, that I would have to devote to a work to be entitled—what? *Mother and Child*? No, that seems sententious; I would like a humble name, beautiful in its simplicity. A name will continue to beckon me all the way, and if I hit upon a good name it will lead me by the hand, and I shall follow, obedient as the child she carries in her arms.

## IX

So pleased was I with my discovery of a subject in which I had not yet been able to find a fault, that my face lighted up as I told Vizetelly how a few words in a newspaper had indicated a subject that would have been accepted by a Greek tragedian for drama—but drama having given way to comedy in London, I would write it in a novel. But the old gentleman in the spectacles behind the dusty table covered with manuscripts and proofs listened indulgently, and when I had finished and he had put one or two questions to me, asking me how long I thought it would take to write this book and I told him about two years, he replied, “Perhaps I shall never see your book.” “And why not? Half my pleasure in writing it — ” “The Vigilance Society’s man has been here purchasing one of our translations of Zola’s novels. That is the law. The prosecutor must prove that he purchased in the publishing house itself one of the books he has in mind to proceed against.” Vizetelly went on to tell that he regretted he was not in the shop below, for had he been he would have recognised the scout and would have sent him away without a proof. “Come again. But now he has the book and any day within the next fourteen

days I may expect a summons." I must have questioned him with my eyes, hoping that he would tell me that he would win the lawsuit, but he said nothing, and every day after unpleasant news continued to come in. The worst news of all was when the lawyer that Vizetelly had engaged to defend him wrote to say that he would prefer to return his brief, and when questioned as to why he would not defend Mr. Vizetelly, he said, "To defend him properly I should have to read the books and there are passages which my conscience would not excuse me for reading." This sentence reported faithfully will show the reader the marked atmosphere of suspicion and treachery that the Vigilance Society had contrived to involve us in. And when the Society manifested itself in the next move, we could not disguise from ourselves the fact that it was out to ruin Vizetelly. The Society had succeeded in getting the support of the Government of the day, and it is very much harder for a single publisher to defend himself against the Government than against a private society. At once Vizetelly felt that he was in danger of losing his case, but he made no lament. He did not speak of his age, which was nearly eighty; he faced the trial with apparent confidence, until the counsel that he had engaged to defend him began to advise him to plead guilty, saying if he pleaded guilty he would get off with a light sentence, whereas if he defended, the judge might not give him the alternative of paying a fine, but send



him straight away to prison. He expected Vizetelly to answer, "Which will be a sentence of death," but he said nothing; he was a grave old man, but he was nearly eighty and his nerve was not what it was, and a defence needed funds and he had no friends who would subscribe. So he pleaded guilty in hope of a lighter sentence. "I am sorry now that I did plead guilty; we had an excellent jury and a clever counsel could have put up a defence which would secure at least a disagreement." Our next misfortune was that Vizetelly's money had run out, and to save his business he took out all the passages in the condemned book that the Vigilance Society had marked as obscene. He reasoned that if he omitted the passages that the Society had marked, they could not proceed against him again. He was wrong. The Society found other passages and started a new prosecution. Again Vizetelly was persuaded to plead guilty, but this time he went to prison for three months, and apparently the Vigilance Society had triumphed. But the triumph was not long lived. A few months later Zola was invited to come to London; he accepted the invitation, and the Lord Mayor and all the officials turned out to honour Zola, the publishing of whose book had ended in the death of Vizetelly. He was dead before Zola came; that is all he was spared. The ceremonies were magnificent; the dinners given to the great author were elaborate, and only a few obscure

newspapers had the heart to call attention to the manifest injustice. The death of Vizetelly had satisfied the Vigilance Society, and it was silent, like hounds after coming to a kill, waiting for something to happen that would enable them to obtain discredit. They waited in vain. What happened was the condemnation of the huntsman that had cried on the pack and arranged for the prosecution of Vizetelly. Nothing less than his death would abate the zeal of these Christians, and Vizetelly was dead. The Vigilance Society looked out for other victims and their hatred was not stayed till W. T. Stead, an honest heart within him, declared that if it was their intention to prosecute the *Heptameron* of the Queen of Navarre written in the 16th century, and Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, he would be forced to resign from the Council of the Society. The charge of being obscene novels was withdrawn, and again the Society thought itself safe—but worse, indeed, was to come. If I may use a simile, a tile from the roof was the arrest, for the seduction of a young cook, of one of the most active members of the Society. When he came into their office and took the chair at the long table, he called for the books that he had selected for further inspection, marking the passages that seemed to him objectionable. He would sit facing the Committee, “to have your opinion, ladies and gentlemen, on these passages. Would you care to look at this, Mrs. A, and when you’ve read it, will you pass it on to

Mrs. B, who is anxious to see it? She has heard the book spoken about." Many of these ladies and gentlemen are dead, but some may be alive, ancient men and women who sleep lightly, and in the long conscious hours which no doubt afflict their slumbers, they cannot fail to come sometimes upon Vizetelly's name. When that happens I can imagine how stricken they must feel when they remember the details of these prosecutions and how carefully they encompassed Vizetelly's death, in the shadowy belief that they were acting like good Christians, *as Christ himself would have acted in like circumstances*. But I must return to my own story.

A prejudice had been created against all that concerned Vizetelly. I remember when I spoke to William Heinemann about his taking over Vizetelly's plates, his answer was, "Any manuscript you bring me I shall be glad to print, but I would like it to come to me first." I do not know whether he used the word 'tainted' literature, it was not like William Heinemann to say that, but I can understand it. Why should he meddle with other people's manuscripts? And it was difficult to find a publisher who would. At last one presented himself—Walter Scott of Newcastle. All the copyrights and stereotype plates and drawings that Vizetelly had collected during a long lifetime were offered for sale, and I was glad to hear that Walter Scott had procured valuable work for a few pounds. It was good news that *A Mummer's Wife*

would appear soon in a new edition and would be followed by *Muslin*. His purchase of the stereotypes of these books did not pledge me to offer the book I was now writing, *Esther Waters*, but I offered it to him and applied myself to the composition of the second half—a difficult task, for I was already pledged to the editor of the *Spectator* to supply a weekly article on painting. But *Esther* pleased me very much, and encouraged, I continued her history, writing about this time the description of the Derby Day, when all the servants went down by road to see the race run.

The reception of *A Mummer's Wife* I have already said was friendly, indeed it was more than friendly; many newspapers of the highest class recognised at once a new voice, and one worthy of hearing. But these friendly notices of *A Mummer's Wife* were quenched in the blaze of a real success. Every paper, high and low, literary and commercial, had the same tale to tell of *Esther Waters*, that a great novel had just been published; illiterate and literate liked it. And when Macmillan asked me how many copies we had sold and I told him 24,000 (in those days books did not sell in the numbers they do in these), he answered, "A great sale indeed. I know of no other book that has sold as much, except perhaps *Tom Brown's Schooldays*." Nothing was lacking. I said to myself, the censorship is dead beyond all hope of resurrection. The nation has wakened up to this monstrosity,

the press will not allow it. And I read every morning fresh articles about the book from all English newspapers and many foreign papers, and after each one I muttered, "Yes, the censorship is over for English literature, and those who have talent can now apply it to the best advantage." At length the news that Mr. Gladstone approved of *Esther Waters* was reported by the *Westminster Gazette*, and I asked myself, What will these two miserable librarians say, or rather, what will they do? and I set off to interview Mr. Mudie's co-adjutor, Mr. Faux, Smith's librarian, saying to myself: "Smith will not dare to ban a newspaper, and if he does not refuse to sell the *Court and Society Review* on his bookstalls, his librarian can hardly refuse to admit the book into the library." And it was with this argument in my head that I mounted a long concrete staircase to arrive on the third storey at lack-lustre rooms in which I discovered a long, lean man, one of those men who have grown old without knowledge of life or literature in the dim shadows of their book-shelves. Mr. Faux was particularly attractive as a specimen. A tangle of dyed hair covered a bald skull, and as he smiled, or rather giggled, his false teeth threatened to jump out at me. His withered face betrayed amusement when he heard that I had called upon him to ask his reasons for excluding *Esther Waters* from his library. "You see," he answered, "we are a circulating library and our subscribers are not used to detailed de-

scriptions of a lying-in hospital." "So you do not aim at distributing good literature, but exclude certain aspects of life which you have decided dogmatically are not suitable to your subscribers in Belgravia and Mayfair." "There is much in good literature that we are bound to exclude." "But can you explain how it is, Mr. Faux, that everybody in England has praised the book, except you and Mr. Mudie, and I heard yesterday that Mr. Mudie had decided to admit the book into his library. Is it wisdom, Mr. Smith—but I changed the words on my lips to Mr. Faux—when all the newspapers in England have published articles in favour of the book—the *Athenaeum*, the *Spectator* and the *Guardian*—the religious papers are specially enthusiastic?" "No. I have read some of the articles in praise of the book, Mr. Moore, but they have said nothing that has shaken my opinion that the book is not suitable to our library." I spoke of classical literature, of Shakespeare and the Bible, but Mr. Faux shook his long lean head and smiled dolefully. Classical literature was another matter. "But what do you do in certain cases—Shakespeare for instance? You are aware of the very doubtful success of Bowdler's Family Shakespeare and how little value a bowdlerised Shakespeare has to-day?" I have forgotten what answer he gave to this interjection, but I could see he was ready with some sort of answer that would only lead us into further wrangling, and I asked him instead about the literature he approved

of, in a tone which suggested to him that I was anxious to avail myself of his opinions, and he told me that Thackeray was the great authority and one worthy to rank with all that was good in English narrative prose. And I heard from him that there was a post-mortem examination of the brain of this elegant Victorian novelist and on being weighed it was found to out-weigh considerably any known brain. "Of course," I said to myself, "your opinion is that the excellence of a man's gift can be measured by the weight of his brain," but the answer was not worth making, and Mr. Faux glided into a history of his successes, one of which I remember though forty years have gone by. It related to a sale of the remainder of one of Stevenson's books, a packet containing some 400 copies (I have forgotten the title of the book), and he had been clever enough to buy this packet, which lay quietly on his shelves, for an instinct had inspired in him the conviction that a boom was coming, and it did come, and the 400 remainder had proved very useful on that occasion. Mr. Faux in his appearance and in his words had painted his own portrait, and I retired, telling him that I hoped to do better next time. But my books continued to be received with favour and the prejudice that Mudie and Smith had stirred up against me was beginning to decline, the twain being looked upon as stupid fellows; and I can only think it was the despair caused by finding himself obliged to refuse to supply a

book that everybody wanted to read that provoked Mr. Faux to take the Press into his confidence, for one day when a reporter came to ask him to give his reasons for banning *Esther Waters*, he answered, "For certain pre-Raphaelite nastiness that Mr. Moore cannot keep out of his writings"; an answer that counsel would be puzzled to justify, so I was told, but instead of a lawyer I called in an accountant who, after checking the sales and reckoning the rebate that Smith's monopoly allows him to ask and get, sent in a report that Smith had lost probably fifteen hundred pounds by refusing to deal in *Esther Waters*. It was after the publication of these figures that I had the satisfaction of hearing that the partners of the firm sent word to their librarian that it would be well in the future to avoid heavy losses by banning books, especially books that Mr. Gladstone was likely to read and to express his approval of in the *Westminster Gazette*.

The censorship of the librarians has come to an end, I said to myself, and I boasted that I had served the cause of humanity.



## X

My next book was *Evelyn Innes*, and it was well received and well reviewed, but because it was received with some doubt, no criticism either private or public daring to affirm it to be an advance on *Esther Waters*, I began to tamper with the text to its no great advantage. Still, editions went on till it reached a sale of about 15,000 in the 6/- edition. It sold well, too, in America, but I still continued to doubt. It rang false in my ear; too much brass in the orchestra. Some powerful, and even finely written passages it contained, I am willing to admit, but it continued to displease my ear, and ear is the test. I admitted it to myself in my meditations by my fire in my low-ceilinged flat in Victoria Street to be too brassy; I heard nothing but trumpets and English horn, and I would have continued long in this strain if it had not been for the fact that I could not remember whether oboe was brass or wood-wind—wood-wind, I thought, but my attention was distracted from revisions of *Evelyn Innes* by visitors. My visitors were Mr. Yeats and Mr. Martyn who had come, I thought, for a pleasant chat, but they had come on business intent, and their business was first to announce the news that they had arranged to start a literary theatre in Ireland. Mr. Yeats and Mr.

Martyn and myself, if I would join and make up a trio. At first I was reluctant to leave London and an unfinished novel, for there was a sequel to be written to *Evelyn Innes*, *Sister Teresa*, but I was out of humour with these books and I agreed to go to Dublin with them.\* Another reason for my acquiescence in acting as one of the directors in the Irish Literary Theatre was the fact that despite the success of *Evelyn Innes* (*Sister Teresa* was not yet published), I began to perceive that my name had disappeared from the columns of the daily and weekly press. My books were reviewed, but my public was not nourished like that of other authors by descriptions of my personal life. I ascribed my absence from the gossip columns to the fact that I had no yacht as Mr. Bennett had; that I had no moor in Scotland. But this explanation of the absence of my name from the gossip columns began to seem unreal, and I sought for another and found a better one in the fact that I hated the war that England was engaged in with the Boers; but the newspapers'

\*Whosoever would read of my efforts to rehearse the plays that were selected for representation, can read an account of them in *Hail and Farewell*. There are other books that I have excluded also, and I take this opportunity of including them in the Black List as unworthy of me. Besides *Evelyn Innes* and *Sister Teresa*, there are *Spring Days* and a few other trifles not worthy of being mentioned. Of course, if my publisher should find sufficient support for any of these books in defiance of my taste, which is no more infallible than the Pope's, he will be free to have them set up again and put on sale. I hope not; but we all live in accordance with the changing laws of aesthetic taste.

forgetfulness of my name could not altogether be on account of my hatred of the Boer War, because many of them were as pro-Boer as myself. And I sought deeper, determined to find out the reason for being constantly overlooked, year after year. At last I had the courage to speak my mind to Gosse, and he answered that it was merely the vanity that possessed us all to be dissatisfied with the world we lived in if our names did not appear in the newspaper. "You look for a G and an M, and if you do not find these letters, you complain." "You are doing me an injustice, my dear friend. I know very well what I am talking about. I search the papers, of course, for my name, just as you search for yours, only you find your name and I do not find mine—that is the difference. There is still another difference; I can prove to you that I am right. It is now two years since the publication of *Esther Waters*, and when it was still selling briskly, a young woman bethought herself of compiling an anthology of all that has been said about servant-maids. She searched literature in every direction and found many passages, but no space for a mention of *Esther Waters*. Her absence was not an accident. The girl may have had doubts about mentioning a book that was not to be had at Smith's Select Library. In her perplexity she consulted her publisher. He would like to have had a figure so dignified and authoritative as *Esther Waters*, but he would not like to prejudice the sale of the book. The anthologist

had collected a large number of passages from authors whose names were known to the generality of readers and she would be on safer ground if she left out *Esther Waters*. It was difficult to decide whether her inclusion would do more harm than good on the bookstalls."

I could see that Gosse had come over to my way of thinking when he admitted that it was easier to create a prejudice than to remove one. Eventually he said, "Prejudice will die down, and people will wonder, as they have often wondered before, how it was that they ever could have thought, and thought sincerely, that *Esther Waters* was not a book for the bookstalls." So do our lives end in indecisions. I cast no blame on the publisher of the anthology or its compiler. I remember that Manet, whose talent was only equalled by Velasquez and was charming as Chardin in his still life, remained nearly all his life without a buyer. Only one man believed in him, the great picture dealer Durand Ruel, who bought two thousand pounds' worth of pictures of Manet's, and that was the beginning and end of Manet's luck. Twenty years passed without a customer, amid jeers of the press and comic papers by writers who knew better but wished to curry favour with their readers. Yet notwithstanding my intimate knowledge of the cloud of injustice which poisoned Manet's life, though he put a bright face upon it, I was surprised that I should meet the same injustice in England over *Esther Waters*. Gosse began to see clearer,

and I went away hoping that my persecution would not be as long as Manet's.

And it was perhaps the belief that England was no more susceptible to art than France that inclined me to lend a willing ear to Mr. Yeats and Edward Martyn. "We shall meet with no prejudices in Dublin." And the argument seeming to me reasonable, I took charge of the rehearsals of Yeats' play, entitled "The Countess Kathleen," and we had an experienced stage-manager to rehearse Martyn's "Heather Field." And when our troop of mummers knew their parts, Yeats and Lady Gregory and I travelled over together to Dublin, leaving Martyn in charge of the actors and actresses. He met them at Euston and bought second-class tickets, travelling first himself, which caused great wrath amid the mummers. However, everybody arrived safe in Dublin, and the plays were produced with acclamation and enthusiasm from the audiences. "Ireland has advanced," I said to myself, "like the rest of the world." Heavy footsteps resounded on the staircase and my door was flung open in great haste; Martyn had come to tell me that the hierarchy were up against the plays. They were led on by Cardinal Logue, "but he admits he has not read the play, he only speaks from hearsay." Half-an-hour later we went out, and Dublin being a small place, we soon came upon Yeats and I said, "We are in the midst of a characteristic Dublin squabble." We were joined by others, and somebody said

that Father Tom Finlay had read the play and decided that there was no heresy in it, therefore we were under no obligation to obey the Cardinal's interdiction. "He has not read the play," many voices cried, "he has not read the play."

After a year and a half's residence in Ireland I began to see Ireland as a portrait, and the form in which to choose to draw her portrait was the scene of a dozen short stories, each equally good, excluding all that was not first rate in story-telling, and I argued with myself that if I succeeded in doing this, I would supply the Irish writers not yet in being with models on which they might make their stories more authentic than mine. The title of the book should have been *A Portrait of Ireland*, but that seemed too flagrant, and I chose another title *The Untilled Field*, which seemed to me sufficiently suggestive of the intention of the book, but I found no storyteller in Ireland who wished to take light from another; they all deemed that they possessed the light, and that when Ireland obtained her freedom she would rise higher than she had ever risen before; that the new Ireland would rival the Greece of Pericles.

I returned to London rejoicing, with two new subjects for books in my head. The first, the figure of a conscience-stricken priest wandering by a lake, for he had denounced from his altar his school-mistress who had had an illegitimate child. Nobody knew where she had gone, and he felt he would never see the face of a happy hour again if she had drowned herself in the lake. The book was praised in the English, and even in the Irish press, and found many readers. I confess myself attached to the book for the sake of the proportion, the balance, the incidents skilfully contrived and introduced without interrupting the narrative, more than for the actual text. I had occasion to read the book the other day and it seemed to me a little common in style, inferior to the *Brook Kerith*. This was my first great advance in the writing of our dear English language, and the advancement continued, though perhaps not so marked, in *Héloise and Abélard*. But it is neither to the *Brook Kerith* nor to *Héloise and Abélard* that my thoughts turn most often, but to *Daphnis and Chloe*. One of the most ingenious miracles is how a work of art comes into being; at first it is a morass, and then something happens, and the picture and the book and the cantata sing of themselves. All that goes down on the canvas and the paper comes from

within, unconsciously. Shelley did well to speak of the unpremeditated song of the lark—his own songs were unpremeditated; he could hardly have been aware of his poetry while it was being written, and afterwards, when he studied it, he must have wondered how it had come into being.

I came down one morning with a letter in my hand reminding me that my agreement with a certain publisher contained a clause that I was to translate *Daphnis and Chloe*. I came down trembling, frightened, unable to believe that I could ever accomplish such a thing. I read many translations of this story, and all were absurd, and now I was going to produce still one more absurdity. But instead of an absurdity, it seemed to me that I was writing more musical prose than I had ever written before. Even the "Proemial," that had floored so many translators, rolled itself out, to use an ordinary simile, like silk off a reel, and when I came to write the first sentence, I wrote the best sentence that I have ever written in my life, and here it is: "The sea flows round Mitylene, a fair city of Lesbos, and channels filled by the sea and adorned by bridges of polished white stone divide it so frequently that the beholder, viewing it from a distance, would perceive a group of small islands rather than a city." How beautiful, I said to myself, but this city of Lesbos would have acquired new beauties under Gooden's graver. A great artist truly—the greatest among



living artists, no one to compare him with except Dürer himself. And looking at a proof of a drawing he had done for *Peronnik the Fool*, a fierce, blustering cock, screaming, perched on a key drawn in perspective, no doubt the key of the secret castle where the sorceress kept the knights she had lured into her service, how he screams! a raucous scream, as if nobody knew except himself that day was near. What intensity in that eye, I continued, what life there is. Look again at his bony legs covered with a hard skin—how wonderfully drawn is the skin. Will my luck give me a publisher when I am among the gone who will ask Gooden to do four, five or six pictures for my *Daphnis and Chloe*? Should such a thing happen, I doubt not that God will open my ears to hear the crowing of the cock.

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